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Assistant Secretary's Daily Activity Report
Office of Andean Affairs
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RELEASED, NON-RESPONSIVE DELETED

VENEZUELA NR

(U) The Secretary's Remarks Make Big Splash: The Secretary's February 5 comments on Venezuela during testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee were big news in Venezuela. For example, leading Caracas daily *El Universal*'s front-page headline proclaimed "U.S. Expresses Disagreement with Chávez Policies." *El Universal* reported that the Secretary said the U.S. was worried about Chávez's actions and his ideas regarding democracy, noted that GOV statements on terrorism had not been helpful and that the GOV could do more in the fight against terrorism, and questioned the rationale and inspiration behind visits to despotic regimes. Hours after the Secretary's remarks, FM Dávila stated to the press, "It is not the policy of the Venezuelan State to solicit authorization, ask for permission, or solicit the approval of any foreign State." "Venezuela's foreign policy is sovereign, independent, and autonomous," the minister proclaimed. Referring to President Chávez's February 4 comments, FM Dávila reinforced, "Venezuela is interested in tending to, maintaining and strengthening relations with the U.S." (*El Universal, Reuters*)

(U) International Catholic Bishops Express Support for Venezuelan Episcopal Conference: Eleven bishops representing the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the (Catholic) Episcopal Conference of Latin American (CELAM), and the (Catholic) Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar expressed their solidarity with the Venezuelan Catholic Church in a letter to the Venezuelan (Catholic) Episcopal Conference on January 29. American Cardinals Law and McCarrick and Bishops Gregory and Skylstad signed this letter. President of the Venezuelan Episcopal Conference Archbishop Porras wrote to these bishops, who were assembled in Washington for a conference on "Humanizing the Global Economy," and shared a communiqué released by the Venezuelan conference that rejected President Chávez's abuse of the Papal Nuncio and verbal assaults on the Catholic hierarchy. The bishops assembled in Washington wrote, "We have been shocked and deeply regret the delicate situation that the Church in Venezuela is experiencing. It is always dangerous to mock the Church in her doctrine, in her life and in her pastors. . . . We express our solidarity with the pilgrim people of God in Venezuela, particularly with its pastors." This letter received wide coverage in the Venezuelan press. (*desk, Bishops' letter*)

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